

THE MILL IN NORSE AND FINNISH MYTHOLOGY

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THE MILK ocean is churned, in Indian myth, with an outlier of the world mountain to produce the *soma* of immortality, as well as a host of other guarantors of the world's fertility and well-being, such as the sun and moon, along with destructive forces such as the poison Kālakūṭa and the goddess of misfortune.¹ No myth relating anything precisely comparable to this striking event appears to exist in Norse, yet the image of a cosmic mill, ambivalently churning out well-being or disaster, may be recognised in certain fragmentary myths.

The image of the cosmic mill is better developed by the neighbours of the Norsemen, the Finns. The tale of the *sampo* provides a poetically elaborated myth against which the Norse remains may be assessed; I shall also consider some of the possibilities of Norse/Finnish influence.

The Sampo

The Finnish *sampo* is never described in detail, nor is its precise function determined; nonetheless, investigation reveals that it represents a highly developed expression of the image of the world mill: the cosmic turning regulates fertility, 'grinding out' well-being like a mill. At the same time, fertility is not perfect, and efforts are made to explain this fact in the *sampo* myths.²

¹ The myth is recounted in the *Mahābhārata*; I have consulted O'Flaherty's translation (1975, 274–80). She gives the passages translated as being from the *Mahābhārata* I.15.5–13; I.16.1–40; I.17.1–30; 7 lines after I.61.35; 3 lines after I.61.32; 3 lines after I.16.36; 3 lines after I.16.40; 3 lines after I.17.7. For a study of this myth alongside Scandinavian analogues (but not involving consideration of any cosmic mill aspects of the Scandinavian myths) see Dumézil 1924, esp. chs 2–3.

² Four versions of the Finnish *sampo* poems are given in *FFPE* nos 12–15; see also the commentary there (526). Kuusi has carried out a thorough analysis of the poem's variants elsewhere (Kuusi 1949). By the twelfth century three poems of different age (but going back at least to c. AD 800)—'The Creation of the World', 'The Forging of the *Sampo*' and 'The Theft of the *Sampo*'—had become established in a fixed sequence (Kuusi 1949, 350–52). This group of poems, forming the so called 'Sampo Epos', had three main redactions in different geographical areas (Häme, Pohjanmaa, Karelia).

In summary, the three main episodes of the epos were:

The Creation of the World.

Väinämöinen, the cosmic sage, is shot by an enemy and drifts wounded for several years at sea where he performs various acts of creation.³

*The Forging of the Sampo.*⁴

Finally, he is washed ashore at Pohjola, whose mistress undertakes to return him to his own people on condition that he forges⁵ her a *sampo* (which is not defined). He promises that his fellow hero Ilmarinen will do this and is allowed to return home. Ilmarinen agrees to forge the *sampo*, in return for which he is told he will receive the daughter of the Mistress of Pohjola. Thus the *sampo* is made and provides the inhabitants of Pohjola with great wealth.⁶

³ 'The Creation of the World' was also sung as a separate poem: motifs vary in the different redactions (FFPE nos 2–5):

a. The common motif is that of the bird (duck, swallow, eagle) which lays its eggs, either on a hummock (Väinämöinen is not present in many versions of the myth), or on Väinämöinen's knee; the eggs are broken (e. g. by a storm) and from them are formed parts of the world (e. g. the sun from the yolk, the firmament from the upper half of the shell, the earth from the lower).

b. Another motif often found is that of the bird diving down to the sea-bottom to bring up mud, from which the world is formed (see Schier 1963 on this common Siberian mythologem, and its analogues in Norse). This motif can be combined with a; for example, in FFPE no. 2 the bird dives down to find pieces of the shattered eggs, which are used to create the world.

c. Only in some versions does Väinämöinen appear; he is presented floating on the ocean (often as a result of shooting by a Lapp, a motif introduced from another poem, FFPE 523), and his function (other than to offer his knee as a nesting place for the bird) is to fashion the sea-bottom (i. e. possibly a variant of b).

In surviving versions of the Sampo Epos Väinämöinen's creative activities are not usually stressed; for example, in FFPE no. 12 (one of the fullest versions), the only remaining sign of creative tasks is Väinämöinen's successful prayer to the god Ukko to raise lumps of black slime on the waters, which reflects the motif of b.

⁴ In the Karelian redaction of the cycle 'The Forging of the Sampo' is replaced by a version of 'The Courtship' (FFPE nos 16, 17), in which Väinämöinen woos the daughter of the Mistress of Pohjola, and is set as his task the forging of the *sampo*.

⁵ The *sampo* is not clearly of metal, but the Finnish word *takoa*, used for the fashioning of the *sampo*, is usually translated as 'forge'; its maker, Ilmarinen, is chiefly a metal-smith in Finnish mythology. In the folk poems vaguer phrases are often used to describe the forging, such as *saada sampo valmihiksi*, 'to get the *sampo* ready'.

⁶ In some versions explicitly by grinding (*jauhaa*), e. g. FFPE no. 12, ll. 165–70.

*The Theft of the Sampo.*⁷

Jealous of this, Väinämöinen and Ilmarinen sail to Pohjola and steal the *sampo*. They are pursued and a furious battle takes place at sea, during which the Mistress of Pohjola changes into a *vaakalintu*, 'griffon', the *sampo* is smashed and the pieces are lost in the sea. These and some fragments that are washed ashore bring fertility to the land and sea.

The epos was sung in a rigid form for some time, for the poem had a ritual function, being sung at the spring sowing, before it began to fragment and diversify.⁸

The word *sampo* derives from an earlier **sampo*, an adjectival formation from **sampa*, a word of no obvious meaning, but which appears originally to have signified 'pillar' (Setälä 1932, 479).⁹ This places the

⁷ Kuusi and Branch (FFPE 527–28) regard the theft episode as showing clear signs of Norse influence; I consider this below.

⁸ Other poems, such as *The Golden Bride* (FFPE nos 21, 22), became incorporated in the epos.

⁹ Two main interpretations have been proposed—and have been so fiercely contested that it has been to the detriment of an understanding of the poetic significance of the *sampo*. A meaning 'pillar' for the base word *sampa*, as Harva argues (1944; 1943, 29; 1948, 47), seems more likely than Haavio's 'mill base' (1967, 197–200). Lönnrot (1958 s. v. *sampa*) records a saying *eihän tuo toki eläne maasammaksi* which he glosses as 'icke må denne lefva till jordstolpe, till Methusalems ålder' ('he cannot live to [be a] world pillar, to Methusalem's age'); thus *maasampa* is used in the sense 'world pillar'. Turunen (1979, s. v. *sampo*) notes that *sammas*, a derivative of *sampa*, is used in compounds such as *rajasammas* in the sense '(border) stone' in Finnish, but in Vätja and Estonian the same word means 'pillar'.

Lexical connexions with 'mill' words are to be viewed as secondary: the standard word for 'mill-base', *sammakko*, is itself to be viewed as a derivative of *sampa*, with the meaning 'that which supports a *sampa* [i. e. the central axle]'; Haavio (1967, 199) points out that in Veps *samba* is equivalent to Finnish *sammakko*, and indeed *sampa* in this sense was recorded in Tyrvää in 1853; since *sammakko* is the standard word, however, *sampa* may be a back-formation; the evidence for *sampa* in this sense is outweighed by the evidence for the sense 'pillar'.

Sampo is a formation with two possible significances, both of which could have been inferred by poets:

1. 'Something fitted with a *sampa*': Haavio (1967, 200) concludes 'since *sampa* (cf. *sammakko*, *sammakka*) means that part of a rotating machine in which the vertical axle is supported and in which it turns without moving to the sides, *sampo(i)* is a rotating machine, of which the important part is the *sampa*' ('koska sampa (vrt. sammakko, sammakka) merkitsee rotaatiokoneen sitä

Finns in the well-documented class of peoples who realised the support of the world under this image (see Harva 1922–23, 9–33). Harva (1943, 42) points to sayings such as *seisoo kun taivaan pönkkä* ‘he stands like the pillar of heaven’ (from Vermland) to show that the world pillar was regarded as unmoving. Whilst the *sampo* itself may have been fixed, however, a mill-like motion is not precluded: with the *sampo* is closely associated the *kirjokansi*, ‘speckled lid’; *kansi*, ‘lid’, is used to mean ‘sky’ in folk poetry, and the *kirjokansi* most likely stands for the sky, speckled with stars and the other heavenly bodies (Harva 1943, 52); Harva (1943, 97; cf. 1922–23, 11) notes some evidence that the *sampo* was thought of as having a nail in its head, around which the heavens turned, the rotation being called *sammasjauho*, ‘pillar/*sampo*-grinding’. Indeed, poets have made full use of connexions of the word *sampa* with parts of the mill, so that the *sampo* was conceived as a mill, and is sometimes called *mylly* or *mellitsa*, ‘mill’, grinding out salt, wealth, and so forth (Harva 1943, 80),¹⁰ perhaps increasingly so as the concept of the world pillar became blurred.

The world pillar and the firmament nailed to it act as an integral unit. The milling arises as a result of the turning of the firmament about the pillar, which produces the seasons, and is hence responsible for the fertility of the world. Whilst this idea is not explicit in any Finnish traditional poetry (Kettunen 1940–41, 38–39),¹¹ it may be surmised to have been the original mechanism, on the basis of pillars with coverings representing the heavens, i. e. equivalent to the *kirjokansi*, amongst other peoples (Harva 1922–23, 15).

The proper place for the *sampo* is clearly Pohjola; the Finns once called the North Star *pohjan naula*, ‘nail of the north’ (Harva 1922–23, 10). The *sampo*, as the world pillar, would be fixed to the firmament, the *kirjokansi*, at the North Nail [= Star]. The reason for the *sampo*’s presence in Pohjola is, as Setälä suggests (1932, 535), that Pohjola, ‘North Land’, was specifically the ‘land at the North Star’, where the world pillar is nailed to

osaa, johon vertikaalinen akseli tukeutuu ja jossa se sivuille liikkumatta pyörii, sampo(i) on rotaatiokone, jonka merkityksellinen osa on sampa’).

2. ‘Small *sampa*’. This is in line with Harva’s suggestion (1943, 101–04) that the Sampo Epos concerns a cult representation of the world pillar, rather than the pillar itself.

¹⁰ For example SKVR I:1:34: *Laai sampu valmeheksi, / Laai laitah jauhomylly, / Toisell’ laiall’ suolamylly, / Kolmanelle rahamylly* (‘Get a *sampo* ready, a grain mill on one side, a salt mill on another side, and a money mill on a third’).

¹¹ Kettunen dismisses the evidence of Kaisa Vilhunen, a ‘forest Finn’ (i. e. a descendant of the seventeenth-century Finnish settlers of Vermland), as her talk of the sky ‘grinding’ was, he believes, prompted by her questioner.

the firmament. As the centre of cosmic rotation, it would be from Pohjola that fertility spread; the jolting of the *sampo* from its home resulted in the uneasy progression of the seasons along with a loss of unending fertility. Setälä (1932, 544–47) notes an obscure verse in which Väinämöinen went *nouva naula pohjolasta*, ‘to fetch the nail from the north’ (i. e. presumably the North Star), which could be equivalent to his fetching the *sampo* from Pohjola.

The fertility aspects are clearly fundamental to the *sampo*.¹² The *sampo* songs were originally sung as accompaniments to the ploughing and sowing of the land.¹³ The myth of the theft and shattering of the *sampo* explained why the fertility of the land was not boundless. As Kuusi notes, the actual shattering of the *sampo* may be derived from the shattering of the egg in the myth of creation (*FFPE* 526);¹⁴ the original conception may have been of a broken, but not shattered, world pillar; clearly there is still the seasonal return of fertility, but it is not as great as it may be imagined to have been originally, when the *sampo* was in place. The concept is one of a shattered ‘Golden Age’.

Grotti in *Grottasǫngr* and Snorri’s *Edda*

The myth of the mill Grotti is told by Snorri in *Skáldskaparmál* (*SnE* 135–38) and in the poem *Grottasǫngr*, which he quotes.¹⁵ The elements of the myth may be summarised thus:

The Mill of Wealth

King Fróði of Denmark is renowned for his peace and his wealth (*SnE*). He buys two strong slave girls Fenja and Menja (*Gr̥s*) from Sweden (*SnE*). The

¹² In rejecting any mill-like aspects of the *sampo*, Harva (1943, 101–04) caused himself unnecessary problems, for, confronted with the difficulty of explaining why the world pillar should be connected with fertility, he proposed that the *sampo* was a cult representation of the world pillar which was worshipped as the guarantor of well-being. In itself this idea is quite possible, for representations of the world pillar are found in all the peoples that have the concept at all; it is however unacceptable to propose that the cult representation was endowed with powers that its cosmic prototype was not.

¹³ Thus Jyrkiini Iivana explained (*SKVR* I:1:88b): ‘when the spring sowing was done, first the ‘sowing words’ were sung and then the song of the forging and theft of the *sampo*, and of the driving back of the Mistress of Pohjola’ (‘Kevätkylvöjä tehtäessä laulettiin ensin kylvösanat ja sitten laulu Sammon taonnasta ja ryöstöstä, sekä Pohjolan emännän takaa-ajosta’). The ‘sowing words’ are recorded in *SKVR* I:4:1743.

¹⁴ The creation myth is recounted in poems nos 2–5 in *FFPE*.

¹⁵ There are brief mentions elsewhere (see Eiríkur Magnússon 1910, 11–13).

quernstones that are to form Grotti are found in Denmark and are given to Fróði by a man with a giant's name (Hengikjöptr) (*SnE*). In *Grs* 10–12 Fenja and Menja claim to have discovered these millstones long ago. They caused earthquakes when they dislodged the stones from the earth. Grotti would produce whatever the grinder bade. No one but Fenja and Menja was strong enough to turn it. Fróði made the giantesses grind gold, peace and prosperity. He granted them almost no rest. They sang *Grottasöngur* as they worked. Furious at Fróði's cruelty to them they ground out an army, and a sea-king Mýsingr came and slew Fróði (*SnE*); in *Grs* there is merely a foretelling of Fróði's overthrow. The quern breaks, and the milling must stop (*Grs*). The end of Fróði's reign is marked by thunderings and lightnings, earthquakes, the disappearance of the sun, and the upsetting of prognostications (*Skjöldunga saga* only, see *Danakonunga sögur* 1982, 39–40). Thus Fróði's peace came to an end.

The Salt Mill

Mýsingr takes Grotti, Fenja and Menja. He bids them grind salt. They grind until the excess of salt sinks the ship. This causes the sea's saltiness.

The Whirlpool Mill

There is now a whirlpool where the sea fell into the eye of the quern.¹⁶ Comparable are traditions about the Mælström, which was regarded as a 'grinder of ships', if not a mill (see below).

Of the three motifs, the poem contains only the first; the salt mill and the whirlpool mill may be later additions of common folk tales to the myth. However, the poem focuses on the demise of Fróði after the cracking of the stone, and may have excluded these elements deliberately.

The Mælström

Purportedly factual reports of the Mælström, the whirlpool off Lofoten in northern Norway, lie very close to the more imaginative concept of a mill in the depths, grinding everything in its stones, and causing a whirlpool with its circular motion, such as is found in the myth of Grotti. Traditions about this real whirlpool may reflect beliefs about Grotti; it is difficult to ascertain whether the myth of Grotti has influenced the picture of the Mælström, or conversely whether the traditions about the Mælström have influenced the depiction of Grotti.

The Mælström is first mentioned in the eighth century by Paulus Diaconus (1878, 55–56); he sites the 'navel of the ocean' near the Scritobini (northern Lapps), i. e. 'on the edge of the world', like Grotti in

¹⁶ According to AM 748 I 4to and 757 a 4to (*SnE* 259) this is in the Pentland Firth; Snæbjörn (see below) places his whirlpool 'out on the rim of the world'.

Snæbjörn (see below), and says that the whirlpool sucks in and regurgitates the currents twice in a day, and ships are pulled down as fast as arrows, then cast back out again just as fast.

A similar description is given by Olaus Magnus (1555, 67), who notes that any ships returned from the eddy were whittled down by rocks. The cause of the phenomenon is assigned to a spirit bursting forth capriciously. Schönnéböl (Storm 1895, 191) gives a similar report in 1591:¹⁷

But I am told by reliable people that there must be some sharp rocks concealed out in that same current, since it flows so terribly strongly, and everything that enters that current must go entirely under and to the bottom.

Snæbjörn's Verse on Grotti

A *lausavísa* attributed to a certain Snæbjörn, perhaps, as Gollancz (1898, xvii) suggests, to be identified with Snæbjörn Hólmsteinsson, an Arctic adventurer of the late tenth century mentioned in *Landnámabók* (1968, 190–95), alludes to a mighty water-mill turned by nine women (*Skj* B I 201):¹⁸

Hvatt kveða hræra Grotta
hergrimmastan skerja
út fyr jarðar skauti
eylúðrs níu brúðir,
þær es, lungs, fyr löngu
líðmeldr, skipa hlíðar
baugskerðir rístr barði
ból, Amlóða mólu.

They say

the nine brides	
of the island quern-frame [the ocean]	{ the waves }
turn vigorously	
a most army-cruel Grotti [mill]	
of the skerries,	{ whirlpool }
out at the rim of the earth [the ocean],	
they who long since have ground	
the meal	
of Amlóði's liquor [sea],	{ sand }

¹⁷ 'Men mig er berettet af trofaste folk, at der skall være nogle hemmelige skarpe klipper udi den samme strøm, efterdi han ber saa saare stærk, og alt det, som kommer udi den samme strøm, det maa alt under og til grunde'.

¹⁸ The following prose word-order is suggested: *Kveða níu brúðir eylúðrs hræra hvatt hergrimmastan Grotta skerja út fyr jarðar skauti, þær er mólu fyr löngu líðmeldr Amlóða. Baugskerðir rístr barði lungs ból hlíðar skipa.*

The ring-diminisher [prince] cuts
 with the prow of his vessel
 the habitation
 of the hillside of ships [the waves]. {the ocean}

'The nine brides of the island quern-frame' are the waves of the ocean (the daughters of Ægir); *lúðr* is the frame of a hand-mill;¹⁹ that which frames islands is the sea (cf. *eyja hringr*, 'ring of [i. e. around] islands', in the same sense) (Meissner 1921, 94); the same sense is found in *jarðar skaut*, 'rim of the earth', i. e. the sea, but in this case there is the additional implication of the action taking place 'out at the edge of the world' where, it is to be surmised, the mythological ocean mill was to be encountered.

Snæbjörn makes his picture of the terrible (and supposedly real) whirlpool vivid by using the metaphor of the mill, identified by metonymy with the mythical Grotti. *Grotta hergrimmastan skerja* appears to identify Grotti as the grinder of the skerries:²⁰ 'The most army-cruel Grotti [= mill, grinder] of skerries'.²¹ *Grotta skerja*, 'mill of skerries', would then be parallel to *eylúðr*, 'mill of islands', if *lúðr* is taken as a synecdoche for 'mill'.²² The 'mill' which grinds up skerries, or at least is sited there, is a whirlpool (cf. the Mælström).²³ An allusion to the 'grinding out' by Grotti of the army which destroyed Fróði is also clear.

¹⁹ Alternatively or additionally, *lúðr* could stand for the whole mill; that which grinds up islands is, again, the sea (cf. *Grotta skerja* below).

²⁰ *Skerja* is either an objective genitive following the verbal sense 'grinder' implied in *Grotti*; or a partitive genitive following *hergrimmastan*.

²¹ It is possible, but less likely, that the 'army' could refer to the skerries: 'Grotti, most cruel to the army of skerries' (Krause 1969, 89).

²² The same meaning is apparent in another verse, attributed to Þórðr Særeksson (*Skj B I 304*, retaining *snýtir*, see *Skj A I 330*):

Svát ór fitjar fjötri,
 flóðs ásynju blóði
 (raust byrjask rømm systra),
 rýtr, eymylvir snýtir.

The island-miller [sea, whirlpool] snorts out the blood of the flood-goddess [water], so that it bellows from the beach-fetter [sea]; a strong roaring of the sisters [waves] begins.

²³ Alternatively, Grotti may be seen as a skerry: 'Grotti, most army-cruel of skerries' (or 'most cruel to an army': *her*, 'army', may be either the root for use in a compound word; or the dative case, *grimmastan* then being taken as a separate word; or the intensive, 'very' (cf. *hermargr*). The masculine form, rather than the neuter, would stem from the word's being in agreement with *Grotta*); this would be an allusion to the sunken rocks in the whirlpool (as with the Mælström),

Líðmældr Amlóða, ‘the meal of the liquor of Amlóði’. ‘The liquor of Amlóði’ (*lið Amlóða*) must refer to the sea, the meal of which is sand.²⁴ The details of Amlóði’s connexion with the sea are now lost to us; that such a connexion existed however is witnessed by Saxo; Prince Amlethus, feigning madness, is walking with some companions along the beach (Saxo Grammaticus 1931, I 79 (III:vi:10)):

Arenarum quoque præteritis clivis, sabulam perinde ac farra aspicere jussus, eadem albicantibus maris procellis permolita esse respondit.

Also, as they pass the sand-dunes they bid him look at the meal, meaning the sand; he replies that it has been ground small by the white tempests of the ocean.

Krause (1969, 94) proposes that Amlóði began as a personification of the irrational tossing sea, which is suggested by his etymology of the name.

Bergelmir

In answer to Óðinn’s question, who was the oldest of the Æsir or of Ymir’s descendants, the giant Vafþrúðnir replies that before the world was made, Bergelmir was born, son of Þrúðgelmir and grandson of Aurgelmir (*Vm* 29). He repeats the first half of his reply in *Vm* 35 in answer to the question of what he first remembered, and continues with more information on Bergelmir:

Ørófi vetra,
áðr væri iqrð um skopoð,
þá var Bergelmir borinn;
þat ek fyrst of man,
er sá inn fróði iqtunn
var á lúðr um lagiðr.

Countless winters
before the earth was fashioned
Bergelmir was born;
that is the first thing I remember,
when that wise giant
was laid on the mill-frame.

identified as the broken mill-stones of Grotti, which cause such havoc to any ship sucked down.

²⁴ Kock (1923–44, nos 572, 573, 1791, 3221) suggests a somewhat different reading of the second part of the stanza. He emends *lungs* to *lyngs*, ‘ling’ (‘the ling of the hillside of ships’ being sea-foam), and assumes the following prose word-order: *þær es fyr löngu mólu líðmældr lyngs skipa hlíðar; baugskerðir rístr barði ból Amlóða*, ‘som för länge sedan malde böljeskummets mjödmäld; ringförödarn skär ijenom sjökungs bo med skeppets stam’. This reading does present a more straightforward word-order, but leaves the word *lið*, ‘liquor’ on its own as a designation of the sea, whereas it is more likely that the word was associated with Amlóði in reference to a now lost legend.

Lið- has also been read with a short vowel; whilst this reading could suggest further allusions to mills, it would necessitate taking *hlið-* at the end of the line as being also short, where a trochee would be expected in *dróttkvætt*. *Lið-* would then

The earliest interpretation of this myth is the one offered by Snorri (*SnE* 14):²⁵

Synir Bors drápu Ymi jotun; en er hann fell, þá hljóp svá mikit blóð ór sárum hans, at með því drekkðu þeir allri ætt hrímpursa, nema einn komsk undan með sínu hýski; þann kalla jotnar Bergelmi; hann fór upp á lúðr sinn ok kona hans ok helzk þar, ok eru af þeim komnar hrímpursa ættir.

The sons of Borr slew the giant Ymir; but when he fell, there flowed so much blood from his wounds that they drowned the whole race of frost giants with it, except that one escaped with his household; him the giants call Bergelmir; he went up onto his mill-frame along with his wife, and was saved there, and from them are descended the races of frost giants.

From Snorri's statements that the frost giants were drowned in Ymir's blood, and that Bergelmir and his family were the only ones to escape to re-establish the frost giants, it is evident that he is identifying Bergelmir's situation with that of Noah (Genesis 6–8), and probably relying on apocryphal accounts of the survival of the giants after the Flood (Og took refuge on the roof of Noah's ark in Rabbinic tradition). Such tales were known in Anglo-Saxon England and early medieval Ireland (James 1920, 40–41; Carney 1955, 102–14). In accordance with his interpretation of Bergelmir's situation, Snorri refers to the *lúðr* ('mill frame') as if it was already a possession of the giant (it is *sinn*, 'his'), into which he and his family could step, as if into a sea vessel which could surmount the waves of blood.²⁶ In following this tradition, Snorri has ignored the text of *Vm* 35,

have four meanings. 'Levy of men' and 'ship' would hark back to Grotti as a grinder up of sea-borne armies. *Liðr* means a 'joint', and hence could also refer to 'limbs'; whilst this could again be a reiteration of the whirlpool's role of grinding up the bodies of crewmen, there could also be an allusion to the myth of Bergelmir (see below). The primary meaning however would surely be that suggested by Johnston (1908–09, 298), 'notch in the upper quern stone', a sense recorded in Norn which developed out of the common meaning in Old Norse of 'joint'. By synecdoche *liðr* would stand for the whole quern: the 'meal of Amlóði's quern' would be 'sand'. This reading is in accord with Snorri's note (*SnE* 118) to Snæbjörn's verse that *hér er kallat hafit Amlóða kvern*, 'here the sea is called Amlóði's quern'. *Hliðar* would mean 'of the side (i. e. hull)'; 'the habitation of the hull of ships' would be an acceptable designation of the sea, but is less satisfactory poetically than 'the habitation of the hillside of ships'.

²⁵ For a synopsis of the various interpretations of the myth of Bergelmir, see Lorenz 1984, 152–57.

²⁶ The vivid identification of Ymir's blood with the roar of man-drowning waves in *Sonatorrek* 3 may well have influenced Snorri (*Skj* B I 34: *Jotuns háls undir þjóta Náins niðr fyr naustdurum* 'the wounds of the giant's throat [waves] roar down by the dwarf's boat-house doors [cliffs]').

which states that Bergelmir 'was laid on a *lúðr*'. Snorri's tale of Bergelmir therefore does not go far towards explaining the myth of *Vm*.

The word *lúðr* has, rather unnecessarily, given rise to a good many interpretations bearing at most a tenuous relation to the recorded meaning of the word in Old Norse, namely 'mill-frame'.²⁷ If Bergelmir was placed on a mill-frame, he was clearly ground up: Rydberg (1886, I 431–32) long ago suggested that after the world was formed from the body of the first giant Ymir the act of creation continued with the milling up of Bergelmir to produce the soil and sand of the beaches (cf. the sand described as 'meal' by the companions of Amlethus in the citation from Saxo above); equally, Bergelmir might represent an alternative mode of creation, syncretised genealogically by making him the grandson of Aurgelmir (who is produced from the primeval waters and then engenders the race of giants according to *Vm* 31).

The name Bergelmir designates the third of a generation of giants with names formed with the element *-gelmir* (cf. *gjalla*, 'roar') mentioned in *Vm* 29. Aurgelmir is either 'mud roarer' or 'ear [of corn] roarer'.²⁸ Þrúðgelmir is 'power roarer'. Bergelmir appears to be 'barley roarer';²⁹ this would fit naturally with the theme of grinding (cf. Byggvir below).

²⁷ Christiansen (1952, 101–5) notes that in modern Norwegian *lur* (from ON *lúðr*) may mean 'cradle'; such a meaning in *Vm* 35 is however inappropriate. Vafþrúðnir is establishing his credentials, as the next in line after the succession of primeval giants Aurgelmir, Þrúðgelmir and Bergelmir, whose babyhood he would thus hardly have remembered; moreover, the description of 'wise giant' would be unsuitable for a baby. Christiansen suggests that the meaning of *lúðr* is therefore 'coffin'—Vafþrúðnir remembers back as far as the end of Bergelmir's life. Holtsmark (1946, 53) points out that *ork* can mean either 'coffin' or 'ark', and suggests that if *lúðr* could mean coffin, Snorri could, by association with it of the two meanings of *ork*, have inferred the ark story he gives.

²⁸ Fulk (1989, 317) suggests that *aur* is cognate with English *ear* (and is also to be found in ON *aurfalr*, 'iron spike at the butt end of a spear'). Fulk interprets *Vm* 33, where Aurgelmir begets a six-headed son, as presenting an image of an ear of corn. His further suggestion, that *-gelmir* is related to OE *gielm*, 'handful of corn', is less likely, in view of the lack of evidence for such a sense in ON.

²⁹ The ostensible sense is 'bear/bare/berry-roarer'; but these interpretations offer no meaning in the context. Another possibility, assuming *-g-* is written for *-gg-*, is that Berggelmir, 'mountain roarer', is intended (perhaps suggesting a rock-crushing mill; cf. Grotti and the Mælström). Most likely however is that *ber-* is from *barr* 'barley'; Fulk (1989, 317) shows that alternating forms of Germanic **bariz-/baraz-* will explain the difference in vowels in *barr* and *ber-*. A less likely possibility is that *bar-* was changed to *ber-* by palatal umlaut before the *g* of *-gelmir* (see Noreen

The element *-gelmir* connects these names with waters. In *Rm* 4 the underworld river Vaðgelmir, ‘ford roarer’, is mentioned; and the primeval source of all rivers, existing before the creation of the world, was Hvergelmir, ‘cauldron roarer’. *Gelmir* is linked etymologically with Gjöll, the river round the underworld (*AR* §577).³⁰ A primordial oceanic connexion and an underworld river connexion are thus implied for the giants of *Vm* (as noted by de Vries, *AR* §577), which is in line with the chthonic powers later associated with giants; more strikingly the names betray their origin as names of roaring waters.

A connexion with fertility is also apparent. In Aurgelmir, *aur-* is either the fertile mud with which the world tree is sprinkled in *Vsp*,³¹ or an ear of corn; in Þrúðgelmir, *þrúðr*, ‘power’, derives from *þróa*, ‘thrive’; in Bergelmir, *ber-* is probably ‘barley’, and the verse calls him specifically *fróðr*, which can mean ‘fertile’ as well as ‘wise’.

If the term *lúðr* is accepted as ‘mill’, then Bergelmir may emerge as a being who furthers the fecundity of the earth through being ground up in a mill. Such a mythological motif is not unique; a tenth-century survey of Muslim culture tells us the following about the fertility god Tammūz, worshipped among the pagans of Haran (Al-Nadim 1970, 758):

Tammūz (July). In the middle of the month there is the Feast of al-Bū-qāt, that is, of the weeping women. It is the Tā-ūz, a feast celebrated for the god Tā-ūz [i. e. Tammūz]. The women weep for him because his master slew him by grinding his bones under a millstone and winnowing them in the wind.

Presumably related to this is the much more ancient Ugaritic myth of the contest of Baal (a fertility god like Tammūz) and Môt, in which Môt is ground up, apparently in an act of bestowing fertility on the land (Gordon 1949, 47: Môt cries out ‘Because of thee, O Baal, I have experienced . . . grinding in the mill-stones’). In Norse too there is found the idea of a divinity, and moreover a divinity of barley, being ground: in *Ls* 44 Loki says to Byggvir (a *nomen agentis* from *bygg*, ‘barley’): *at eyrom Freys mundu æ vera ok und kvernom klaka*, ‘you shall ever be at Freyr’s ears and

1970, §73 on this umlaut; he cites the example (with a different vowel affected) *Þórger for Þorgeirr*, which parallels *Bergelmir* in being a compound word).

³⁰ AEW links several other words, see s. vv. *Aurgelmir*, *galmr* (‘sword’), *gjalla* (‘cry’), *gala* (‘sing’), *gjöll* (‘noise’).

³¹ He could be a variant of the image of the first giant body (Snorri identifies him with Ymir (*SnE* 12), an identification suggesting a syncretism of traditions about creation from a giant’s body) conceived as a piece of *aurr* in the roaring primordial waters; cf. the ‘earth out of ocean’ creation motif of *Vsp* 3 with its Eurasian analogues (see Schier 1963).

twitter beneath the quern'. Since Byggvir is the god of barley, which is the basic ingredient of ale, the reference here is clearly to the grinding of the grain in the brewing process.

Thus in the reference to Bergelmir being laid on the *lúðr* may possibly lie an allusion to a cosmic mill, associated with water. The Indian churning of the Milk Sea would present a parallel instance of the fertile 'milling' of water.

Mundilfæri

The image of a cosmic mill may lie behind *Vm* 23:³²

Mundilfæri heitir,	He is called Mundilfæri,
hann er Mána faðir	the father of Moon
ok svá Sólar it sama;	and also of Sun;
himin hverfa	they are to turn heaven
þau skulo hverian dag	every day
öldom at ártali.	for the reckoning of years for men.

The commonly accepted translation of *hverfa* as 'traverse' is unacceptable, since the use of *hverfa* without a preposition in this sense would be unparalleled;³³ the meaning must be transitive 'turn'. We may note that in *Vsp* 5:1–4 the sun moves her hand purposefully.

The name Mundilfæri occurs only here and in *SnE* 17–18 (based on this stanza). The majority reading of the manuscripts is *-færi*. Related to *færa*, 'move, carry', *-færi* could signify 'mover, carrier', or 'device, instrument, equipment designed for a special purpose' (see Fritzner 1886–96, s. v. *færi* 3); or as a weak adjective, 'effective, capable'. *Mundil-* may be related to *mund*, 'hand', or *mund*, 'time'; there may even be a play on both senses, accounting for the uniqueness of the name. Cleasby and Vigfusson (1957, s. v. *Mundil-föri*) suggest that the name is 'akin to *möndull* [mill-handle], referring to the veering round or revolution of the heavens'.

If Cleasby and Vigfusson are right, the name Mundilfæri has been designed to signify the mill-like device that turns the heavens by means of a 'handle'. Sun and Moon are, according to this genealogical fiction, his children who operate the device for him or by means of him. This turning of the cosmos, pictured as a mill, is the diurnal and yearly movement of the heavens.

³² The interpretation of *Vm* 23 given here is based on that of Ursula Dronke, in her note to *Vsp* 5:1–4 in the forthcoming *Poetic Edda* vol. 2 (she points out that *Vsp* 5:5–10 shows every sign of being an interpolation).

³³ Cf. *Grm* 25:5 *þær* [the rivers] *hverfa um hodd goða*, 'they turn about the hoard (? temple) of the gods'.

In the Indian myth of the Milk Sea, the sun and moon arise as a result of the churning of the milk ocean, just as in Norse they are the children of the turner of the cosmos.

A very similar image to that suggested for the Mundilfœri myth occurs in a Mordvin mythological poem (text and German translation in Ahlqvist 1861, 133–34). Here, the sun, moon and stars are said to be on the handle of a ladle which rests in a honey drink at the foot of the world tree; as the sun wends across the sky, the handle of the ladle turns likewise. The ladle clearly represents the firmament, turning with the sun. No one seems to be responsible for the turning here, a feature shared with the Finnish *sampo*, but differing from the Norse myths of Mundilfœri and of Grotti.

Comparison

Although the Norse seem to have been familiar with the image of the pillar sustaining the world,³⁴ the world support does not appear as the pivot of the cosmic mill, as it does in Finnish. If the myth of Mundilfœri is correctly interpreted as the turning of the sky by a handle-like device, then this would represent an adaptation of the cosmic mill, in this case to express a concept of time. The ‘handle’ could be a version of the world support.

The turning of the world like a mill is the subject of the (proposed interpretation of) the myth of Mundilfœri, which is therefore comparable with the turning of the heavens about the *sampo*. This feature is not apparent in the other Norse myths.

Grotti is supernaturally productive, but this productivity is not related by the sources to acts of cosmic creation, as in the Indian myth. Grotti produces both beneficent objects (gold) and maleficent (an army), as does the Indian churning (here may be seen the development of a concept of a ‘wheel of fortune’ out of the basic idea of the fertile mill); the Finnish *sampo* does not churn out maleficent produce. The myth of Bergelmir seems to involve creative activity (either as a continuation or as an alternative image of primal creation). The myth of Mundilfœri is not concerned with creation, but with the determining of time, the seasons.³⁵

³⁴ The *öndvegissúlur*, ‘high-seat pillars’, dedicated to Þórr, may have been regarded as symbolising this pillar (Dronke 1992, 678–81); Þórr’s title *himinsjói* in *Þórdrápa* is interpreted by Davidson (1983, 605) as ‘heaven pillar’: the god here represents the hypostatised world support. Various aspects of the god Heimdallr also suggest that he is a hypostasis of the world support (see Pipping 1925, 7–49; 1926, 24–64, 107–24).

³⁵ *Ártal*; *ár* implies primarily time, but can also mean ‘abundance’.

The concept of a 'Golden Age' is more stressed in the myth of Grotti than in the Finnish and Indian analogues (it does not appear in the other Norse myths). The time of earthly paradise under Fróði also mirrors the early time of the gods recounted in *Vsp*.³⁶

Grotti is stolen, like the *sampo* and the *soma*; however, in Norse the mill-stone is not desired—its theft is presented as incidental to a viking attack, whereas in Finnish and Indian the possession of the *sampo* and *soma* respectively is the object of the attack. No theft is involved in the other Norse myths.

Grotti breaks (but, in *SnE*, causes the sea's saltiness); the *sampo* shatters (but its fragments endow earth and sea with fertility); no breaking of any 'mill' is indicated in the other Norse myths.³⁷

According to *SnE* Grotti ends up in the sea, like the *sampo*; however, this is connected with the folk-tale motif of 'why the sea is salt' (Thompson A1115), not with fertility as in the Finnish and Indian analogues. By his name and family Bergelmir is closely connected with roaring waters and with fertility. The myth of Mundilfæri shows no connexion with fertile waters.

It is clear that the cosmic mill was not, in extant Norse sources, a widely developed mythologem. Nonetheless, the myth of Mundilfæri connects the turning of the cosmos via a 'mill-handle' with the regulation of seasons, and the myth of Bergelmir suggests the concept of a creative milling of a giant's body, associated in some way with the sea. Grotti was a legendary mill sunk in the depths, regarded as a one-time producer of a golden age: the myths about it allude to the concept of a milling on a supernatural scale, such as the Bergelmir myth may (in a different context) have exemplified.

The Sampo and Norse Tales

It is clear that the *sampo* forms an integral part of traditional Finnish cosmology, whereas the mill in Norse occupies a peripheral place in

³⁶ In *Vsp* 7 the gods forged gold in plenty, and were happy (cf. Fróði creating gold with Grotti); three mighty giantesses arrive (cf. Fenja and Menja); it seems that the maidens deprive the gods of the game of chequers they have been playing, possibly by overturning it, and the pieces are lost (they turn up again in the new world in *Vsp* 61), signifying the loss of the prosperity that relied on gold (cf. the wrecking of Grotti by Fenja and Menja, and the loss of Grotti in the sea, signalling the end of Fróði's Golden Age). See van Hamel (1934, 220–21), whose interpretation I follow, on the 'golden age' of the gods in *Vsp*.

³⁷ The text of *Vm* implies at least that the grinding of Bergelmir was a past event rather than a continuing one.

mythology. It is strange then to find that two features of the *sampo* myth are regarded by the authors of *FFPE*, who reflect the generally accepted Finnish scholarly position, as influenced by Norse tales: the concept of the *sampo* as a wealth-producing mill, and the theft of it (*FFPE* 527–28).

The Wealth-Producing Mill

The *sampo* and Grotti have some features in common; on the other hand, many points speak against any influence.

Grotti is a quern mill, and the *sampo* is often pictured as a mill, though its origins seem rather to be in the world pillar. As noted above, it is unnecessary to seek outside influence to explain the mill-like aspects of the *sampo*.

Grotti churns out whatever it is commanded to, in particular gold; the *sampo* grinds out meal, salt or wealth. The ability of Grotti to grind out ill-fortune (both physical, in the form of an army, and abstract, in the form of the fall of Fróði and Mýsingr) finds no parallel in the *sampo*, which never loses its fertile, positive effects even when shattered. The fertility-producing aspects of the *sampo* are integral to its mythological nature and no explanation involving foreign influence is required.

Grotti is turned by two giantesses; the *sampo* is not said to be turned by anyone.

Grotti is stolen by a sea-king; the *sampo* is stolen by mythical heroes arriving by sea. Grotti breaks and sinks into the ocean, together with all the salt it has ground; the *sampo* shatters and most of it ends up in the sea, producing salt and the riches of the ocean (see *FFPE* no. 13). The wealth-producing mill is an international folk-tale motif, often coupled with the motifs of the stealing of the mill and of its ending up in the ocean grinding salt.³⁸ There is no need to seek specifically Norse influence.

Grotti upon sinking produces a *svelgr*, ‘whirlpool’; the whirlpool (*merennielu*, *kurimus*) is known to Finnish myth, borrowed, according to Harva (1948, 65), from elsewhere, since the Finns could have known no such phenomenon themselves, but it is not associated with the sunken *sampo*. The *sampo* could not have caused the whirlpool since, in the recorded version of the myth, it is shattered, not merely broken like Grotti.

Grotti, by the time it is represented in Norse tradition, plays a part in certain distinct mythological situations not represented in Finnish myth.

³⁸ Olrik (1903–10, I 290–96) gives several examples, e. g. a French tale of a sorcerer who had a mill that would grind out whatever was bidden; a Newfoundlander stole it, put it on a ship, and told it to mill salt: the mill would not stop when told to, and sank the ship, causing the sea to be salty.

The giants appear as antagonists of the gods or orderly society of men; the fall of the house of Fróði is presented; and Grotti is not an artefact (as is the *sampo*), but, being composed of rocks, is a part of the archaic chthonic world (with which giants are connected).

The Theft of the Sampo

Branch writes (*FFPE* 527):

The theft [of the *sampo*] shows clear evidence of Scandinavian influence and the main motifs, although not the themes to which they are tied, appear to have been borrowed from medieval mythical-heroic *fornaldarsögur*.

Branch mentions specifically *Bósa saga*, noting some narrative parallels which he considers make influence seem likely. Unfortunately he merely leaves it to the reader to infer from the (not wholly adequate) summary of *Bósa saga* that he gives what is supposed to have been borrowed, so I offer my own analysis:

1. A magic egg, full of gold, must be stolen by the hero Bósi to avoid punishment (*FSN* III 296); the egg resembles the *sampo* in that it is a source of gold (and the temple where it is kept is sacked of its large amounts of treasure), as the *sampo* is a source of wealth.

2. The setting of the Norse tale is the northern (Finnic) realm of Bjarmaland (*FSN* III 296–97, 307); that of the Finnish tale is Pohjola, ‘North Land’. Little can be made of the fact that two journeys are made in the Norse, as in the Finnish (the original drifting there by Väinämöinen, and the subsequent military campaign to steal the *sampo*).

3. The egg is in the possession of a *gammr*, ‘vulture’, which attacks Bósi when he steals the egg, and uses its claws in the attack (*FSN* III 300–01); the *sampo* is guarded by the Mistress of Pohjola, who turns into a *vaakalintu*, ‘griffon’, and attacks, using her claws to seize parts of the *sampo*.

4. An abducted princess Hleiðr is living at the temple where the egg is kept, and is being trained to become a successor to the priestess there, and when Bósi captures the egg, he is able to free this princess and take her away with him (*FSN* III 299, 302–03); Ilmarinen is offered the daughter of the Mistress of Pohjola in exchange for providing a *sampo* (i. e. the opposite of the Norse motif, where the acquiring of the maid is associated with the theft of the magic object rather than with the making of it).

5. The hero Smiðr of the Norse (*FSN* III 284, 307 etc.) corresponds to Ilmarinen the smith of the Finnish, in that the name of the one is the profession of the other, and in that both acquire a girl on the expedition (see 6c).

6. *Bósa saga* involves a number of abductions of women:

- a. Hleiðr is rescued (the first time) and taken to Gautland (Bósi's land) (FSN III 303–04); the theft of the girl corresponds to that of the *sampo*.
- b. She is rescued (a second time) from Gautland by her brother's friends and taken home to Glasir Plains (FSN III 305–06).
- c. She is rescued (a third time) by Smiðr (Bósi's companion) (FSN III 313–14); cf. the winning of the daughter of Pohjola by Ilmarinen the smith.
- d. A second princess is abducted, by the hero (FSN III 317).

7. Her brothers (one of whom was to wed the first princess) pursue and there is a sea-battle; the Mistress of Pohjola pursues the thieves as they flee by sea.

8. The hero and his friends win the battle with difficulty, since the enemy king (the father of the second princess) changes shape into a dragon and then a boar (and monstrous helpers, a bird and bitch, aid the heroes) (FSN III 319–20); cf. the Finnish Mistress of Pohjola becoming a griffon (*vaakalintu*) and fighting the stealers of the *sampo*.

The differences between the sources are great, making the tracing of any influence difficult. It emerges that Branch's 'clear evidence' is based on little more than a superficial reading of the Norse 'analogue'.

The events of *Bósa saga* form a startling narrative full of interlace with no more than arbitrary motivation for many of the exploits, the objects of which lack any significance comparable to that of the *sampo*. The Finnish tale of the *sampo* is coherent and well-constructed, and functions within a recognised mythological framework.

The *sampo* myth focuses on a central feature of the Finnish cosmology, whereas *Bósa saga* can by no means be seen as reflecting any central aspect of Norse religion or mythology. An example is the *vaakalintu*, which the Mistress of Pohjola transforms herself into, which is clearly a form of shamanic helping spirit (Oinas 1985, 151); this corresponds in the *Bósa saga* to grotesque fairy-tale monsters (the *gammr* and the dragon), with no part in Norse religious life.

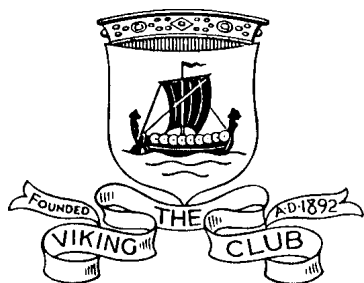
It is difficult to see when and where the Finns could have borrowed from anything resembling *Bósa saga*, a fourteenth-century work, whereas we know Bjarmaland to have been a major trading centre for the Norse up to the twelfth century; they no doubt picked up more than merely the Finnish word for 'god',³⁹ and the saga's setting in Bjarmaland may witness to a tradition that it was from there that the story derived. If any influence was involved, it was no doubt from the Finns on the Norse.

³⁹ A tale recounted in *Heimskringla* II 230–32 records that the name of the Bjarmian's god was Jómali, which, as Ross (1981, 50) shows, derives from Finnish/Karelian *jumala* 'god'.

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